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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to survey a sample of RSVP volunteers in an attempt to identify those areas of the program which were and were not providing satisfaction. Subjects were 100 volunteers, 50 who had dropped out of the program and 50 who were still active. A telephone survey was conducted by trained staff. The results for most volunteers who are continuing to serve are as follows: (1) they are assigned to community agencies; (2) they are between ages 70 and 74; (3) they were recruited by center staff or other volunteers; (4) they appear very much satisfied with their assignments; (5) they see meals as an important program component; (6) they were less affected by health programs than drop-outs; (7) about 50% live alone; and (8) they were little affected by feelings about staff or transportation. Except for health factors, no statistically significant differences were found between continuing program volunteers and drop-outs. Thus, the satisfactions measured by this survey must no longer be the major factors leading to retention of volunteers. Additional research is needed to isolate those conditions which influence retention. (Author/JLL)

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ED154272

FACTORS RELATING TO RETENTION of SENIOR VOLUNTEERS

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U S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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For many years the questions related to the retention of volunteers have been largely disregarded in the volunteer field as a whole, perhaps because the traditional volunteer bureau has viewed its responsibilities as limited to recruitment and placement. With the development of other brokerage systems the interrelatedness of Recruitment, Retention and Recognition, has become increasingly important. The problem, not yet adequately addressed, is how can the brokerage programs and the "volunteer stations" together assume greater responsibility for the retention of volunteers?

Because the reliability of older volunteers had been seriously questioned, early program demonstrations, such as SERVE[1] in 1967, assumed responsibility for developing techniques to enhance retention rates, and included the study of retention even though traditionally this responsibility was lodged in the agencies where volunteers were placed. When RSVP was inaugurated as a national program in 1971 the responsibility for the retention of volunteers was of major concern to sponsoring agencies since grants were dependent upon an increasing number of volunteers. A program requirement was that volunteers be 60 years of age and older. One assumed there would be a number who would drop out for various reasons not associated with satisfactions with the program, such as; moving to a new area, debilitating or long illnesses and death. Therefore, the retention of those who could continue to serve became even more important.

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[1] Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Service

During the early program development of SERVE and RSVP, high retention rates were documented as due to a variety of reasons, primarily associated with program satisfactions. The satisfactions described by the volunteer were with the agency where he was placed - his volunteer assignment - and the new identifications provided as a substitute for role losses, to name but a few. Thus a decrease in the retention rate began to be seen as a possible decrease in satisfaction with the program.

This concern led RSVP-in-New York City staff, together with the Committee on Aging of the Community Service Society (CSS), to a decision, in March of 1977, to survey a sample of RSVP volunteers in an attempt to identify those areas of program which were and were not providing satisfactions as hypothesized. The CSS, Office of Program Planning and Research provided assistance in developing a questionnaire.[1] It was pretested by the research staff and finalized for use by the interviewers. One hundred volunteers were selected by random sample, 50 who had dropped out of the program and 50 who were still active so that comparisons could be made. It should be noted that 18 of those selected by this method were not interviewed because they could not be reached by telephone and were disregarded lest erroneous implications be drawn. Therefore, an additional 18 were selected by the same random sampling method, thus the 100 volunteers reported on completed the interviews. Members of the Committee on Aging and members of the RSVP Advisory Committee agreed to do the telephone survey and were trained by staff to ensure uniformity.[2]

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1. See RSVP Consumer Survey attached.
2. Since it is more difficult to establish rapport with older persons by telephone than by face to face interviews, we regard this as a limitation in this approach.

A face sheet was prepared by research staff and was completed by the RSVP staff. Questions were asked about their satisfactions with their volunteer assignments, transportation, meals and RSVP staff. Although their personal problems and comments were recorded, no direct questions were asked. A final question related to living arrangements.

The responses elicited reflected some interesting data about the program.[1] Most of the volunteers, 62%, who were continuing to serve are assigned to community agencies as contrasted to 30% who are assigned to a senior center and 4% who are serving as a volunteer in an institution or residence in which they themselves reside. Of those who dropped out, 44% served community agencies, 38% were serving in a senior center or club and 18% in a place of residence. There seems to be greater satisfaction derived from an assignment in a community agency.

Thirty-four per cent (34%) of those who are continuing to be involved are between 70 to 74 years of age while 20% of those who dropped out were in the same age group, and 34% of those who dropped out were under 70 years of age. However, of those in the 80 to 84 year group, 8% were continuing while 14% had dropped out and in the 85+ group 2% were continuing while 8% had dropped out. Therefore it seems that there is a larger rate of drop outs of those who are over 80 as well as those under 70.

The distribution of male and female were almost identifical for the drop outs and the non drop outs so that no implications can be drawn.

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1. See Tables I-VII, attached.

The largest number of volunteers who remained in the program, 34%, were recruited by center staff and an additional 34% influenced themselves to volunteer. While for those who dropped out 18% were recruited by center staff, 16% by RSVP staff and 20% by self. It would therefore seem that the recruiter is not a significant factor.

Ninety-four per cent (94%) of those continuing to serve were very much satisfied with their assignments as contrasted to 76% of those who had dropped out. Thus, satisfactions with assignments do seem to impact on volunteers remaining with the program.

Their positive feelings about RSVP and agency staff, and the people they served seemed to make little difference. Although satisfaction with transportation showed little difference between those who dropped out and those who continued to serve, 74% of those who remained with the program were very satisfied with their arrangements as compared with 68% of those who dropped out.[1] Meals seemed to be more important with 68% saying it was very important and 10% somewhat important for a total of 78% who continued, while 40% thought it was very important and 24% somewhat important of those who dropped out for a total of 64%. Therefore, we can see that senior volunteers see food as an important program component whether or not they continue to serve. To further substantiate this, of those who remained with the program 74% had lunch and 8% a snack, while of those who dropped out only 56% had lunch and 10% had a snack.

Although wanting to work, transportation problems, and family problems did not show major differences, health problems demonstrated

1. This is in part due to the lack of program development that involved transportation due to limited funds.

a significant difference between the groups at the point .02 level of significance, with 26% of those continuing describing a health problem while 50% of those who dropped out had a health problem.

Living arrangements revealed that many of the volunteers lived alone - 50% of those continuing and 48% of those who dropped out. Thirty-four per cent (34%) of those continuing lived with a spouse as opposed to 22% of those who dropped. Of those who lived with another relative (not children) 2% were continuing while 14% had dropped out.

As we analyzed this data it became apparent that except for the health factors we had not arrived at statistically significant differences. If this is true, then the satisfactions measured by this survey must no longer be the major factors leading to retention of volunteers. What then are the factors which are impacting on program maintenance?

Although this study will not give us the answer it does illustrate the need for additional research on a whole new set of questions. The last decade has brought many changes in the senior center field which are undoubtedly impacting on RSVP. The image of the older person as a volunteer has changed from skeptisism about his abilities to a proliferation of volunteer programs in addition to RSVP which are competing for the talents of the older volunteer.

When RSVP was developing opportunities for volunteers, volunteering was seen as one means of adding new roles to the older persons life in an attempt to replace those he lost as he grew older. However, many more, centers and clubs are now in existence and they are no longer offering limited programs, instead the programs have become increasingly

varied, interesting, stimulating and rich. Thus, there are a multiplicity of choices for those who wish to become involved. A very different milieu from that which existed in the early 1970's. Another exciting development in recent years has been the rapid expansion of educational opportunities for the older person in a variety of academic settings, many free courses are offered, others at nominal fees.

Because of the proliferation of pre-retirement courses by business and unions many still employed people are giving more thought to their retirement years and are better prepared to handle the changes that occur when retirement is actually upon them. Hopefully, they will suffer less from a sense of role-lessness or role deprivation than earlier retirees who had not had the opportunity for advance discussion of the range of opportunities available to them.

Increasingly, attention by both public and private sectors is being given to the development of courses for the upgrading of earlier skills, for re-training older persons in a new skill, and for providing employment opportunities. A highly significant recent development still under Congressional consideration, is a proposal to do away with mandatory retirement. Another less popular proposal, designed to ease the financial drain on the Social Security system, is for full Social Security benefits to be available at age 68 rather than 65.

With each succeeding generation of retirees, there is strong likelihood that they will be better educated, and more discriminating in how they wish to utilize their leisure time, more interested in challenging rather than the "so called routine" volunteer assignment. More and more older persons are becoming sophisticated in the art of advocacy for their own peer group and there are more and more groups,

both formal and informal, to organize and coordinate their activities.

In summary, senior citizens now have more options from which to choose as they decide how to use their leisure time in retirement. For those who choose volunteer activities there are also wider choices as many more agencies are seeking older people for volunteer assignments. As agencies in both the private and public sectors face continuing budgetary cuts in human service delivery systems, reliance on volunteers is bound to increase as will the competition.

This study was developed with the expectation, based on prior experience, that the factors relating to satisfactions would reveal significant difference between those who continued in their volunteer assignments and those who had not. Except for one factor -- health -- we did not arrive at statistically significant differences between the two groups. This then leads to the need for additional research which would elucidate the additional factors which must be considered in order to isolate those conditions which influence retention. Many of the more recent developments in the field of aging should be taken into account as we try to identify the pertinent factors.

Insufficient attention has been given to the problem of retention by staff in a variety of settings in which volunteers are critically needed. It is usually handled as if recruitment and recognition will solve all problems. What attitudes, program components, including follow-up are necessary in order to avoid the high cost associated with rapid turnover? The brokerage programs cannot assume this responsibility in isolation from those utilizing the services of its volunteers. The major question this raises for the volunteer field is Retention, whose responsibility?

OPP&R
CM/ms
March 1977
(Revised)

RSVP CONSUMER SURVEY

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY STAFF

R (1) S (2) V (3)

(4) (5) (6) Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

(7) Volunteer Status: Drop-out ___ (1) Non-Drop-out ___ (2)

(8) (9) (10) Volunteer Station: _____

(11) Borough: Manhattan ___ (1) Brooklyn ___ (2) Bronx ___ (3) Queens ___ (4)

(12) Volunteer Chairman: Yes ___ (1) No ___ (2)

(13) Type of Volunteer Assignment: In-House Residential ___ (1)
In-Center ___ (2) Community ___ (3)

(14) Date of Enrollment in RSVP: 1972 ___ (1) 1973 ___ (2) 1974 ___ (3)
1975 ___ (4) 1976 ___ (5)

(15) Age: 60-64 ___ (1) 65-69 ___ (2) 70-74 ___ (3) 75-79 ___ (4) 80-84 ___ (5)
85 + ___ (6)

Date of Last Attendance: _____

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY INTERVIEWER

We are talking to a number of volunteers about their experiences. We hope this will help us improve the Retired Senior Volunteer Program in New York City. I would appreciate it very much if you would answer a few questions about your volunteer experience.

I. a. What do you usually do when you volunteer at

_____?
(Vol. Station))

_____

_____

(17) Able to describe ___ (1) Not able to describe ___ (2)
Did not volunteer ___ (3)

b. What gave you the idea to volunteer?_____

_____

(18) Senior Center Staff ___ (1) RSVP recruiter ___ (2)
Residential facility staff ___ (3) Media ___ (4) Friend ___ (5)
Relative ___ (6) Other Volunteer ___ (7) Self ___ (8) Other ___ (9)
Not Ascertainable ___ (0)

II. There are a number of things that volunteers may or may not like about their work. For example, how do you feel about the other volunteers you work with? (Interviewer: substitute each of the following in turn.) Would you say you like them very much, don't particularly like them or don't care one way or the other about them?

(19) a. Other volunteers you work with: Very much ___ (1) Somewhat ___ (2)
Not at all ___ (3) Not Applicable ___ (4) Not Ascertainable ___ (0)

_____

_____

(20) b. Your own volunteer assignment: Very much ___(1) Somewhat ___(2)
Not at all ___(3) Not Ascertainable ___(0)

_____

_____

(21) c. People you help: Very much ___(1) Somewhat ___(2) Not at all ___(3)
Not Applicable ___(4) Not Ascertainable ___(0)

_____

_____

(22) d. RSVP staff: Very much ___(1) Somewhat ___(2) Not at all ___(3)
Not Ascertainable ___(0)

_____

_____

_____

(23) e. Wearing Volunteer Name Badge: Very much ___(1) Somewhat ___(2)
Not at all ___(3) Not Ascertainable ___(0)

_____

_____

(24) f. Agency Staff where you volunteer: Very much ___(1)
Somewhat ___(2) Not at all ___(3)
Not Ascertainable ___(0)

_____

_____

(25) g. Recognition Day: Very much ___ Somewhat ___ Not at all ___
(1) (2) (3)
Didn't go ___ Not Ascertainable ___
(4) (0)

III. a. How do you get to your placement? For example, do you travel there as part of a group, do you walk there, or do you take the bus or subway by yourself?

(26) Group transport ___ Individual transport ___
(1) (2)
Walk or in-house ___ Not Ascertainable ___
(3) (0)

---

b. How satisfied are you with these arrangements? Would you say you are: Very satisfied ___ Somewhat satisfied ___
(27) (1) (2)
Not satisfied at all ___ Not applicable (residential) ___
(3) (4)
Not ascertainable ___
(0)
If not satisfied, why not? _____

IV a. How important do you think most volunteers feel it is to receive something to eat at their volunteer placement?
Very ___ Somewhat ___ Not at all ___
(28) (1) (2) (3)
Not applicable (residential) ___ Not Ascertainable ___
(4) (0)

b. What do you receive to eat at your placement? For example do you receive: Lucnch ___ Snack ___ Neither ___
(29) (1) (2) (3)
Not applicable (residential) ___ Not Ascertainable ___
(4) (0)

V. a. How important do you think it is to most volunteers to see a lot of RSVP staff?

(30) Very important ___ (1) Somewhat important ___ (2)
Not important ___ (3) Not Ascertainable ___ (0)

_____

_____

b. Are you satisfied with your talks with RSVP staff?

(31) Yes ___ (1) No ___ (2) Not Ascertainable ___ (0)

If not, can you explain what you mean?_____

_____

_____

c. How often do you talk to a member of the RSVP staff?

(32) More than once a month ___ (1) Once a month ___ (2)
every 2-3 months ___ (3) Every 4-6 months ___ (4)
Once a year or less ___ (5) Not Ascertainable ___ (0)

_____

_____

VI. a. Have you had any problems with your health in the past few months which have affected your ability to carry out your volunteer assignment? Yes ___ (1) No ___ (2)

(33) Not Ascertainable ___ (0)

If yes, can you explain what? _____

_____

b. Have you had any family problems recently which have affected your ability to carry out your volunteer assignment? Yes ___ (1) No ___ (2) Not Ascertainable ___ (0)

(34) If yes, what were they? _____

_____

c. Has working for pay interfered with your volunteer assignment in recent months? Yes ___ (1) No ___ (2) (35)

Not ascertainable ___ (0)

If yes, what kind of work were you doing?_____

_____

d. Have transportation problems affected your ability to carry out your volunteer responsibilities? Yes ___ (1) No ___ (2) Not Ascertainable ___ (0) (36)

If yes, please explain:_____

_____

VII. Are there any other things which have made it difficult or unpleasant for you to carry out your volunteer assignment? Please say what they are. Probe: Anything else? (Interviewer: Do not give examples unless asked. Check all items mentioned.)

a. Did not like program, agency or assignment: Mention Mentioned ___ (1) Not Mentioned ___ (2) (37)

If mentioned, please explain: _____

_____

b. Did not like placement agency staff: Mentioned ___ (1) (38)

Not mentioned ___ (2)

If mentioned, please explain:_____

_____

c. Did not like RSVP staff: Mentioned ___ (1) Not Mentioned ___ (2) (39)

If mentioned, please explain:_____

_____

d. Wanted to do something else: Mentioned ___ (1) (40)

Not mentioned ___ (2)

If mentioned, please explain:_____

_____

(41) e. Too busy, no time: Mentioned ___ (1) Not Mentioned ___ (2)

If mentioned, please explain:_____

_____

(42) f. Wanted to travel: Mentioned ___ (1) Not Mentioned ___ (2)

If mentioned, please explain: _____

_____

(43) g. Other _____ (specify) .: Mentioned ___ (1)

Not Mentioned ___ (2)

If mentioned, please explain:_____

_____

(44) VIII. With whom do you presently live? Alone ___ (1) Spouse ___ (2)

Children ___ (3) Other relative ___ (4) Friend ___ (5) Institution ___ (6)

Other ___ (7) Not Ascertainable ___ (0)

It has been very nice talking with you. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Interviewer's Name _____

Date Interview Completed_____

ANALYSIS OF RSVP-in-NEW YORK CITY SURVEY

TABLE I - FACE SHEET DATA	Non Drop-Outs		Drop-Out	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per
Borough:				
Bronx	13	26.0	10	2(
Brooklyn	15	30.0	5	1(
Manhattan	14	28.0	23	4(
Queens	8	16.0	12	2(
Volunteer Chairman				
Yes	35	70.0	28	56
No	15	30.0	22	44
Type of Volunteer Assignment:				
In-House Residential	4	8.0	9	18
In-Center	15	30.0	19	38
Community	31	62.0	22	44
Date of Enrollment in R.S.V.P:				
1972	-	-	-	-
1973	3	6.0	5	10.
1974	11	22.0	17	34.
1975	25	50.0	10	20.
1976	11	22.0	18	36.
Age:				
60 - 64	3	6.0	5	10.0
65 - 69	13	26.0	12	24.0
70 - 74	17	34.0	10	20.0
75 - 79	12	24.0	12	24.0
80 - 84	4	8.0	7	14.0
85+	1	2.0	4	8.0
Sex:				
Male	11	22.0	12	24.0
Female	39	78.0	38	76.0

TABLE II - VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT

	Non Drop-Outs		Drop-Outs	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
What do you usually do when you volunteer?				
Able to describe	50	100.0	50	100.0
Not able to describe	-	-	-	-
Did not volunteer	-	-	-	-
What gave you the idea to volunteer?				
Senior Center Staff	17	34.0	9	18.0
RSVP recruiter	2	4.0	8	16.0
Residential facility staff	2	4.0	4	8.0
Media	-	-	1	2.0
Friend	2	4.0	5	10.0
Relative	4	8.0	2	4.0
Other Volunteer	-	-	2	4.0
Self	17	34.0	10	20.0
Other	5	10.0	6	12.0
Not Ascertainable	1	2.0	3	6.0
How do you like the other volunteers you work with?				
Very Much	36	72.0	40	80.0
Somewhat	8	16.0	3	6.0
Not at all	1	2.0	2	4.0
Not applicable	5	10.0	1	2.0
Not ascertainable	-	-	4	8.0
How do you like your own volunteer assignment?				
Very much	47	94.0	38	76.0
Somewhat	3	6.0	9	18.0
Not at all	-	-	2	4.0
Not ascertainable	-	-	1	2.0
How do you like the people you help?				
Very much	38	76.0	36	72.0
Somewhat	7	14.0	5	10.0
Not at all	-	-	2	4.0
Not applicable	3	6.0	3	6.0
Not ascertainable	2	4.0	4	8.0
How do you like RSVP staff				
Very much	25	50.0	27	54.0
Somewhat	5	10.0	7	14.0
Not at all	2	4.0	4	8.0
Not ascertainable	18	36.0	12	24.0

TABLE III - TRANSPORTATION & MEALS

	Non Drop-Outs		Drop-Outs	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
How do you get to your placement?				
Group Transportation	17	34.0	15	30.0
Individual	13	26.0	12	24.0
Walk or In-house	20	40.0	21	42.0
Not Ascertainable	-		2	4.0
How satisfied are you with these arrangements?				
Very satisfied	37	74.0	34	68.0
Somewhat	3	6.0	3	6.0
Not satisfied at all	7	14.0	3	6.0
Not applicable (residential)	3	6.0	4	8.0
Not ascertainable	-	-	6	12.0
How important do you think most volunteers feel it is to receive something to eat at their volunteer placement?				
Very	34	68.0	20	40.0
Somewhat	5	10.0	12	24.0
Not at all	3	6.0	6	12.0
Not applicable(residential)	4	8.0	5	10.0
Not ascertainable	4	8.0	7	14.0
What do you receive to eat at placement?				
Lunch	37	74.0	28	56.0
Snack	4	8.0	5	10.0
Neither	3	6.0	6	12.0
Not applicable (residential)	5	10.0	8	16.0
Not ascertainable	1	2.0	3	6.0

TABLE IV - R.S.V.P. STAFF

	Non Drop-Outs		Drop-Outs	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
How important is it to most volunteers to see a lot of R.S.V.P. staff?				
Very important	16	32.0	18	36.0
Somewhat important	13	26.0	12	24.0
Not important	7	14.0	6	12.0
Not ascertainable	14	28.0	14	28.0
Are you satisfied with your talks with R.S.V.P. staff?				
Yes	28	56.0	25	50.0
No	1	2.0	2	4.0
Not ascertainable	21	42.0	23	46.0
How often do you talk to a member of the R.S.V.P. staff?				
More than once a month	7	14.0	8	16.0
Once a month	8	16.0	7	14.0
Every 2 - 3 months	5	10.0	4	8.0
Every 4 - 6 months	2	4.0	-	-
Once a year	3	6.0	5	10.0
Not ascertainable	25	50.0	26	52.0

TABLE V - PERSONAL PROBLEMS

	Non Drop-Outs		Drop-Outs	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Have you had any problems with your health in the past few months which have affected your ability to carry out your volunteer assignments?				
Yes	13	26.0	25	50.0
No	37	74.0	25	50.0
Not ascertainable	-	-	-	-
Have you had any family problems recently which have affected your ability to carry out your volunteer assignment?				
Yes	11	22.0	11	22.0
No	38	76.0	38	76.0
Not ascertainable	1	2.0	1	2.0
Has working for pay interferred with your volunteer assignment in recent months?				
Yes	1	2.0	1	2.0
No	48	96.0	47	94.0
Not ascertainable	1	2.0	2	4.0
Have transportation problems affected your ability to carry out your volunteer responsibilities?				
Yes	5	10.0	4	8.0
No	45	90.0	43	86.0
Not ascertainable	-	-	3	6.0

TABLE VI - GENERAL DIFFICULTIES *

	Non Drop-Outs		Drop-Outs	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Did not like program, agency and assignment				
Mentioned	4	8.0	5	10.0
Not mentioned	46	92.0	45	90.0
Did not like placement agency staff				
Mentioned	4	8.0	6	12.0
Not mentioned	46	92.0	44	88.0
Did not like R.S.V.P. staff				
Mentioned	1	2.0	4	8.0
Not mentioned	49	98.0	46	92.0
Wanted to do something else				
Mentioned	-	-	6	12.0
Not mentioned	50	100.0	44	88.0
Too busy, no time				
Mentioned	1	2.0	4	8.0
Not mentioned	49	98.0	46	92.0
Wanted to travel				
Mentioned	1	2.0	2	4.0
Not mentioned	49	98.0	48	96.0
Other				
Mentioned	1	2.0	11	22.0
Not mentioned	49	98.0	39	78.0

*Interviewer merely checked all items mentioned

TABLE VII - LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

	Non Drop-Outs		Drop-Ou	
	Number	-Per Cent	Number	Pe
With whom do you presently live?				
Alone	25	50.0	24	4
Spouse	17	34.0	11	2
Children	1	2.0	-	
Other Relative	1	2.0	7	1
Friend	1	2.0	-	
Institution	4	8.0	7	1
Other	-	-	-	
Not Ascertainable	1	2.0	1	2